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## Making connections with their world: outdoor provision for under-twos in early childhood settings in Kent

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# MAKING CONNECTIONS WITH THEIR WORLD

## OUTDOOR PROVISION FOR UNDER-TWOS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD SETTINGS IN KENT



Dr Nicola Kemp, Dr Ian Durrant & Dr Jo Josephidou





APRIL 2020

# CONTENTS

<b>Introducing the Authors .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Introducing the research project .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Executive summary .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>1. What we did: An audit of outdoor provision in Kent.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>2. What we found.....</b>	<b>11</b>
2.1 What types of outdoor area do settings provide for babies and toddlers? .....	11
2.2 What access do babies and toddlers have to the outdoors when in a setting? .....	11
2.3 What do settings provide for babies and toddlers to do outdoors? .....	13
2.4 Factors influencing time spent outdoors .....	16
2.5 Importance of spending time outside .....	17
<b>3. Conclusions and next steps.....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Appendix 1: Audit of outside provision .....</b>	<b>20</b>

# INTRODUCING THE AUTHORS

## NICOLA KEMP

Nicola is a senior lecturer in the Faculty of Education at Canterbury Christ Church University where she is the Programme Director for the MA in Early Childhood Education as well as the co-lead for sustainability research. With an academic background in rural and environmental geography, her research interests include children's connection with nature, outdoor learning and sustainability education. She is currently leading a Froebel Trust funded project on outdoor provision for under twos in early childhood settings as well as a project exploring the educational potential of Harmony, a form of sustainability education.



## IAN DURRANT

Ian is a senior lecturer in the Faculty of Education at Canterbury Christ Church University. He teaches on a range of programmes, including Early Childhood Studies, Special Educational Needs and Inclusion and Counselling, Coaching and Mentoring. His research has included citizenship education in schools, use of the pupil premium and supporting children with life limiting illnesses. Most recently he has investigated organisational culture in the public sector and its impact on working relationships.



## JO JOSEPHIDOU

Jo is a lecturer in Early Childhood at the Open University. She was a primary school teacher before entering Higher Education to work in ITE (Initial Teacher Education) and then ECS (Early Childhood Studies) at the University of Cumbria and Canterbury Christ Church University. Her own research has focused on appropriate pedagogies with young children and how practitioner gender may impact on these. She is also working with Nicola on the Froebel Trust project 'A life 'in and with nature?' An exploration of outdoor provision in baby rooms' and is a co-author of the blog 'Contemplatingchildhoods.com'.





# INTRODUCING THE RESEARCH PROJECT

This report is the second stage of a research project, **A life 'in and with nature?' An exploration of outdoor provision in baby rooms**, made possible by funding from the Froebel Trust. The outdoors is central to Froebelian philosophy and practice and, for Froebel, experiences in the earliest period of childhood were particularly significant since the *'whole being is here only an appropriating eye...'* This research is inspired by his understanding that, *'Life in and with nature, and with the clear, still objects of nature must be fostered at this time by the parents and members of the family as the chief point of reference of the whole child-life'* and seeks to explore its significance in contemporary practice. The growing number of very young children in the UK and beyond who now spend time in formal day care suggest that it is important to know more about outdoor provision for under twos.

There are three stages to the research:

1. A review of the international literature about outdoor provision for babies and toddlers attending formal day care. A report of our findings can be accessed via the following link <https://www.froebel.org.uk/resources/froebel-trust-publications/>
2. An audit of outdoor provision for under-twos settings in Kent (the focus of this report).
3. Case studies of good practice in supporting babies' and toddlers' engagement with the outdoor environment.

Since there is a lack of research into babies and toddlers' engagement with the outdoors, our hope is that this original research will contribute to knowledge and understanding of this important area and will ultimately impact positively on practice.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank all the settings in Kent that have taken the time to respond to our audit and to Laura Duncan and Sam Prescott who supported this stage of the research by administering the audit. Our thanks also go to John Hills and Kerry Holman for creating the maps included in the report. We are extremely grateful to Ben Cornwell for designing this report and being so generous in his support of our research.

All images used have kindly been provided with permission by parents and practitioners – thank you!

April 2020

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1 Froebel, F. (1826) *The Education of Man*. Translated by Jarvis 1885. New York: A. Lovell and Company.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This original research funded by the Froebel Trust presents an overview of outdoor provision for babies and toddlers across Kent. Based on an online survey sent to every identified setting in the county with provision for under twos, it offers new insights about how settings make provision for the youngest children to spend time outdoors. We have shown that the sample of respondents is broadly representative of all settings in the county with provision for babies and toddlers both socio-economically and geographically. This means that the findings can be read with a good degree of confidence and make a significant contribution to knowledge and understanding about this important issue.

## What types of outdoor area do settings provide for babies and toddlers?

The nature and extent of outdoor provision reported by settings varies considerably. At most settings, the outdoor space is shared between babies and toddlers. A small number of settings report a specific commitment to outdoor provision and provide access to diverse outdoor environments. These are not necessarily owned by the setting which highlights the potential significance of off-site outdoor environments.

## What access do babies and toddlers have to the outdoors when in a setting?

Most settings report that babies and toddlers in their care go outdoors twice a day or more all year around.

## What do settings provide for babies and toddlers to do outdoors?

**Physical activity:** All settings report that they provide varied resources to support physical activity and recognise the diverse benefits of being physical outdoors for babies and toddlers. Artificial grass is a popular choice of surface to support physical activity such as crawling, walking and running for this age group, as is safety surfacing.

**Sensory Engagement:** Most settings provide places for babies and toddlers to sit with some highlighting 'quiet areas' and resources to support sensory engagement such as herbs and flowers for smelling. Some settings include animal care as part of their provision.

**Sleeping Outdoors:** Just under half of settings report that babies and toddlers sleep outside at their setting. However, at most settings, babies and toddlers do not routinely sleep outside but they may be left outside if they have fallen asleep in a pushchair or pram whilst on a walk. Outdoor sleeping is only actively encouraged in a minority of settings by providing mats, blankets, cots or blankets.

**Eating outdoors:** The outdoor environment is used as a place to eat and having a picnic or snack outside is a commonly reported activity. Over 90% of respondents said the children eat outside, although this is mostly in the summertime.

## What factors influence outdoor access?

The most commonly reported factor influencing access was the weather. Other influences include the children's preference, daily routines, staffing, the type of outdoor area available, parental support and health and safety concerns.

## How important do settings think being outdoors is for babies and toddlers and why?

Almost all respondents agree that spending time outside was very important for both babies and toddlers. Although there is a reported emphasis on physical development, most respondents recognise multiple benefits of time spent outdoors with under twos and they feel it encourages holistic and integrated development.

# 1. WHAT WE DID: AN AUDIT OF OUTDOOR PROVISION IN KENT

In the second phase of this Froebel Trust funded study, we conducted an audit of outdoor provision for under twos within one large, and geographically diverse county, Kent. As so little is known about this provision, our interest was in establishing a baseline to understand the following questions:

- What types of outdoor area do settings provide for babies and toddlers?
- What access do babies and toddlers have to the outdoors when in a setting?
- What do settings provide for babies and toddlers to do outdoors?
- What factors influence time spent outdoors?
- How important do settings think being outdoors is for babies and toddlers?

## Identifying settings with provision for under twos

We firstly needed to identify all early childhood settings operating in the county of Kent (total: 565 settings) and then confirm which of these included provision for under twos. This was done using information in the public domain such as setting websites and publicity. A total of 133 settings with provision for babies and toddlers were identified and these became the sample for the audit.

## Developing the audit questions

The questions for the audit were informed by our review of existing research<sup>2</sup> and focused on: the type of setting; the nature and extent of its outdoor provision; how much time children spend outdoors throughout the year; the activities the children engage in, and resources provided by the setting to support this. The audit included both closed (yes/no or option-based) and open questions (to provide further detail and explanation). The questions were put into an online survey using Qualtrics online survey tool<sup>3</sup>. The survey questions are included in Appendix 1.

## Piloting the audit

Before sending the audit out, we spent some time testing it with practitioners and colleagues who would not be part of the main sample. We also tested it ourselves to see how long it took to complete and how easy the questions were to understand. This was an important part of the process and allowed us to make changes to the audit before sending it out. We specifically recognised the need to define (and be able to justify) what we mean by babies and toddlers. Discussion from the pilot respondents made it clear that settings organise provision for under twos in diverse ways and for our results to be comparable there needed to be a common understanding of the terms. We decided to define babies as children aged between 0-12 months and toddlers as children aged between 13-24 months. This reflects the World Health Organisation's definition of a baby or infant as a child younger than one year of age. It also acknowledges the significance of this first year of development and the associated changes in mobility (particularly starting to walk) which are potentially significant in engaging with the outdoors.

## Sending the audit out

All 133 settings with provision for under twos were contacted by email in July 2019 with a link to the survey and this was followed by a reminder email a week later. 37 settings responded giving an initial response rate of 28%. At the end of summer 2019, all settings that had not responded were contacted by telephone. In total 68 settings responded to the audit giving an overall response rate of 51%. In the majority of cases (94%) it was the setting manager who completed the survey with just three settings delegating the task to a deputy manager.

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2 Kemp, N. and Josephidou, J. (2020) *Where are the babies? Engaging under twos with the outdoors*. Available at: <https://www.froebel.org.uk/resources/froebel-trust-publications/>

3 [www.qualtrics.com](http://www.qualtrics.com)



## Analysing the responses

The responses to each question were uploaded into SPSS 23 and the dataset was cleaned to eliminate incomplete responses, duplications (where someone had started the audit and then logged back in to complete it again) and those which were not relevant to the research (i.e. the setting doesn't include provision for under twos). Of the original 68 responses, 15 were removed giving a sample of 53 settings (final response rate 40%). This cleaned dataset was then analysed in SPSS and a report based on descriptive statistics was developed. The bar charts included in the report all show responses to questions by percentage (y axis). Qualitative responses were used to contextualise the statistical analysis and these were analysed thematically. 43 settings provided qualifying comments to support their responses to at least one question with ten settings providing very detailed and comprehensive qualitative comments. These seem to be the settings that are most engaged in outdoor learning and consequently have the most to report so this needs to be considered when reading the report. Some questions (such as the factors influencing access to the outdoors) yielded rich and diverse explanatory comments from multiple respondents so offer more general insights.

## Contextualising the responses

It is important to understand something about the context of the settings that responded to the audit. It is particularly important to know how representative our sample is of settings in the county with provision for under twos (who did not respond). There are different ways in which the settings who responded could be compared with those that didn't but for the purposes of this research we are particularly interested in the setting location and its Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) score<sup>4</sup>. This is because we know that there is a wider concern that children and families living in areas of high deprivation generally have less access to outdoor environments and particularly, local green spaces<sup>5</sup>. Figure 1 and Table 1 compare settings that responded with those that didn't. These confirm that settings that responded are situated in both affluent and more deprived areas of Kent. However, a comparison with those who didn't respond shows the respondents are less likely to be in the most deprived areas (IMD deciles 1&2) and more likely to be in least deprived areas (IMD deciles 9 &10).

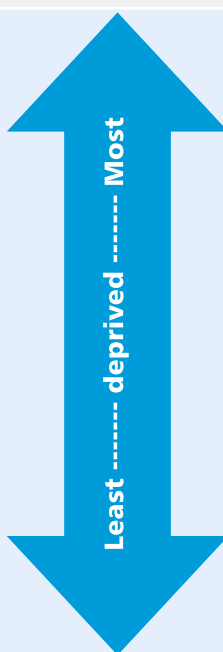
	IMD Decile	Response	No Response
	1	3.8% (2)	6.2% (5)
	2	-	9.6% (8)
	3	7.5% (4)	12% (10)
	4	11.3% (6)	13.3% (11)
	5	17% (9)	10.8% (9)
	6	15.1% (8)	3.6% (3)
	7	7.5% (4)	18.1% (15)
	8	11.3% (6)	13.3% (11)
	9	13.2% (7)	7.2% (6)
	10	7.5% (4)	6% (5)
Location non-identifiable:		5.6% (3)	
<b>Total</b>		<b>100% (53)</b>	<b>100% (83)</b>

Table 1: Location of centres who did and did not complete the audit by IMD decile (1 -represents the most deprived areas, 10 -represents the least deprived areas)

<sup>4</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2019](http://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2019)

<sup>5</sup> DEFRA (2018) *A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment*. Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/693158/25-year-environment-plan.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/693158/25-year-environment-plan.pdf)

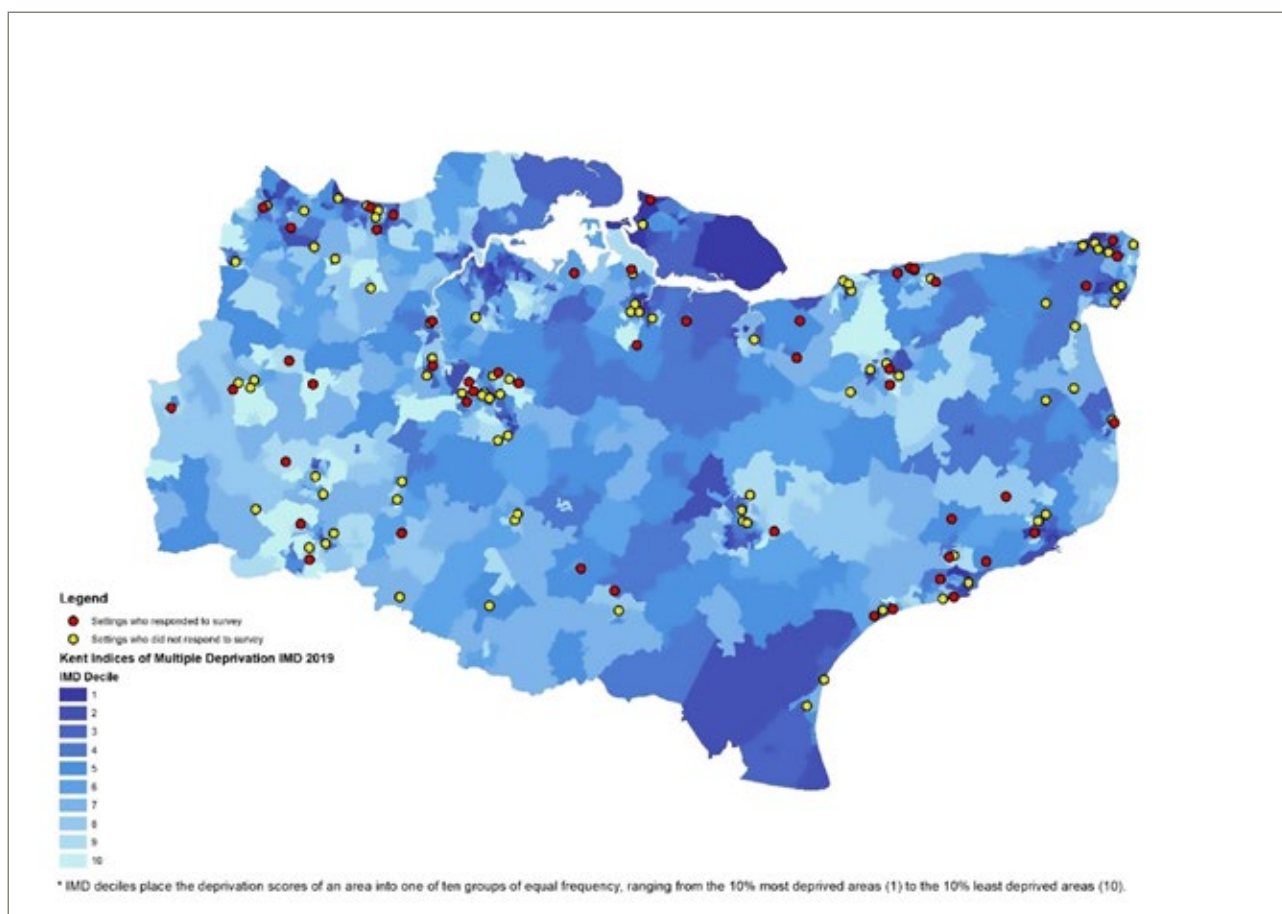


Fig. 1: Map of Kent indicating location of responding and non-responding settings with provision for under twos in relation to IMD data. (1 - dark blue, represents the most deprived areas, 10 - light blue represents the least deprived areas)

As we are interested in outdoor provision, we also considered the geographical location of settings that responded to those that did not. For this we drew upon the government's Rural Urban Classification developed by the Office for National Statistics<sup>6</sup>. Table 2 and Figure 2 show that responding settings are in all types of geographical location. However, a slightly higher percentage of responding settings are rural (33.9%) compared to those settings with provision for under twos that did not respond (22.9%).

Urban/Rural Category	Response	No Response
Urban major conurbation	7.5% (4)	8.4% (7)
Urban city and town	52.8% (28)	66.3% (55)
Rural town and fringe	13.2% (7)	13.3% (11)
Rural village	11.3% (6)	8.4% (7)
Rural hamlets and isolated dwellings	9.4% (5)	1.2% (1)
Location non-identifiable	5.6% (3)	
<b>Total</b>	<b>100% (53)</b>	<b>100% (83)</b>

Table 2: Location of centres who did and did not complete the audit

6 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/methodology/geography/geographicalproducts/ruralurbanclassifications>.

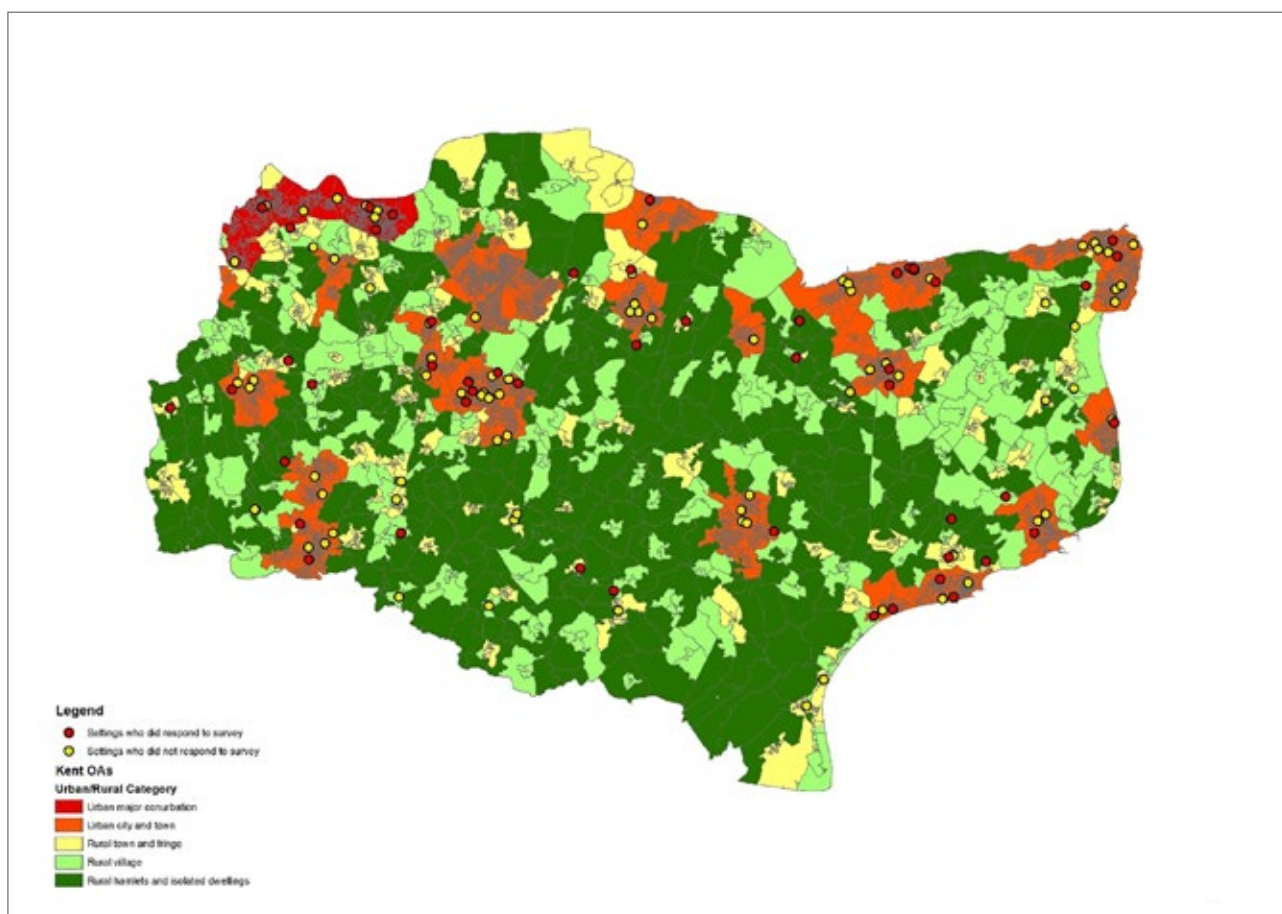


Fig. 2: Map of Kent indicating location of responding and non-responding settings

Overall, the settings that responded to the audit are slightly more likely to be located in less deprived, more rural locations than those that did not respond.

The size of settings varies considerably but on average they care for 7 babies (range is 0-36) and 11 toddlers (range 0-45) each day. This provision is organised in different ways with smaller settings tending to offer a babyroom which caters for all under twos whilst larger settings divide children according to age, demand for places and the individual needs of the child.

In the following analysis, all settings have been allocated a unique code made up of a number (setting 1-53); a letter (U indicating urban or R indicating rural); a second number (1-10 referring to its IMD decile) For example, '23U1' indicates setting number 23 in an urban location with a IMD score of 1. This provides contextual information for the qualitative comments included in the report.

## 2. WHAT WE FOUND

### 2.1 WHAT TYPES OF OUTDOOR AREA DO SETTINGS PROVIDE FOR BABIES AND TODDLERS?

The nature and extent of outdoor provision reported by settings varies considerably.

Whilst almost half of settings provide separate accommodation for babies inside, outside space is most commonly shared between babies and toddlers (72%). This is important as it suggests that there should be little difference in the reported data relating to the resources provided for babies and toddlers.

The size of the outdoor area reported for babies and toddlers ranges from just 5 to almost 30,000 square metres. However, it is not clear whether this reflects the size of the main outdoor area specifically provided for under twos or whether it also includes areas that this age group might use infrequently. Artificial grass is the most common surface, followed by hard surfaces such as tarmac or paving stones. Fewer than half of settings include grass in their outdoor area for babies or toddlers.

A small number of settings report a specific commitment to outdoor provision and provide access to diverse outdoor environments. These are not necessarily owned by the setting which highlights the potential significance of off-site outdoor environments:

*We are a Forest School. (25U4)*

*We pride ourselves on being an outdoor focused provision and people choose our setting because of this. (26U10)*

### 2.2 WHAT ACCESS DO BABIES AND TODDLERS HAVE TO THE OUTDOORS WHEN IN A SETTING?

Most settings report that babies and toddlers in their care go outdoors twice a day or more all year around.

Time spent outdoors varies according to the season with both babies and toddlers spending the most time outside in summer and least in winter.

Free-flow provision is more common for toddlers than babies although a minority of settings state they provide free-flow access for both babies and toddlers throughout the year (see Figures 3 & 4 below).

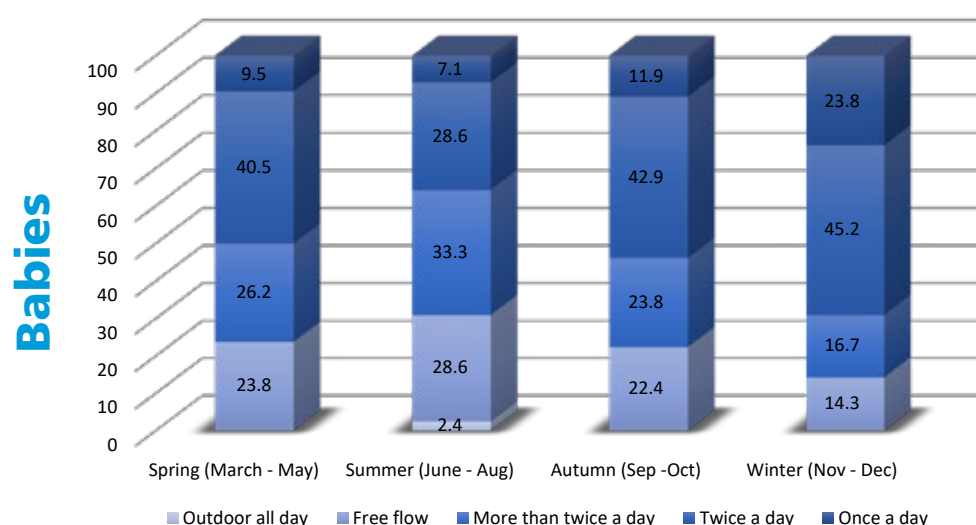


Fig. 3: Frequency of access to the outdoors for babies (percentage of respondents)



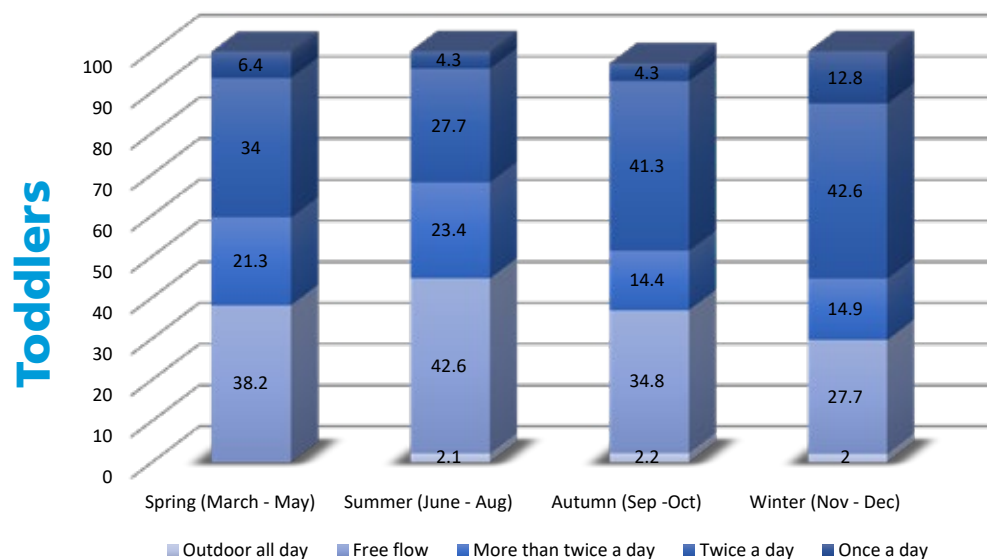


Fig. 4: Frequency of access to the outdoors for toddlers (percentage of respondents)

Most centres reported that both babies (67.4%) and toddlers (79.8%) spent more than half an hour outside each day, even in the winter (see figs 5 & 6 below).

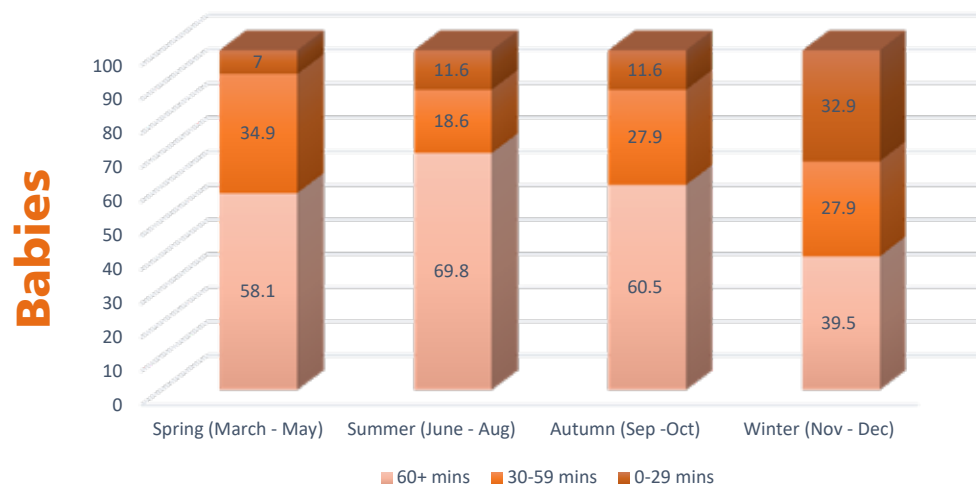


Fig. 5: Duration of time spent outdoors for babies each season (percentage of respondents)

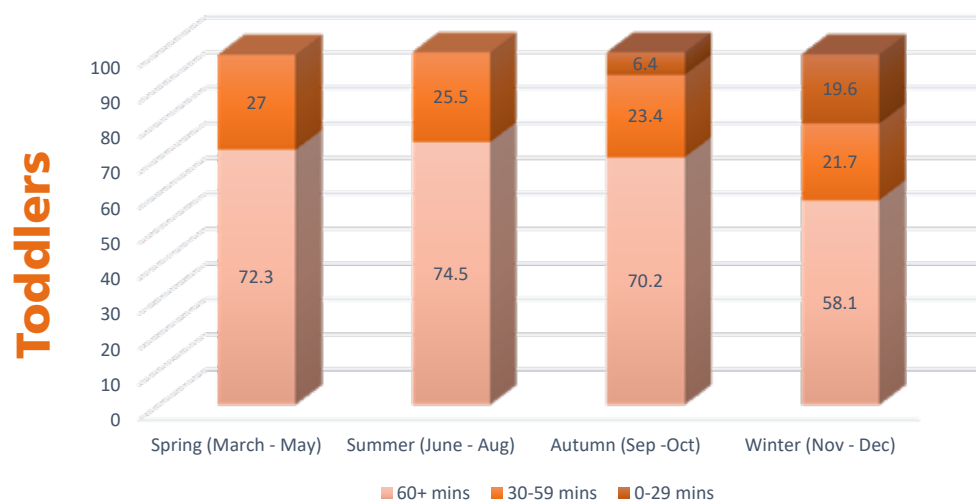


Fig. 6: Duration of time spent outdoors for toddlers each season (percentage of respondents)

## 2.3 WHAT DO SETTINGS PROVIDE FOR BABIES AND TODDLERS TO DO OUTDOORS?

### 2.3.1 Supporting physical activity

All settings report that they provide varied resources to support physical activity and recognise the diverse benefits of being physical outdoors for babies and toddlers:

*Physical activity promotes stronger bones and healthy hearts, reduces the chances of being overweight and generally makes you feel healthy. (17R7)*

*...be challenged to take risks and build their resilience. (22R5)*

*...they develop more advanced physical skills when using their gross muscles which tends to happen more frequently outside. (6U5)*

We asked questions about provision to support different types of gross motor physical activity. Climbing was the most commonly supported activity with provision including (in order from most frequently used); steps, moveable climbing structures, fixed climbing structures, slopes and mounds. Although some settings mentioned natural features, there is a reliance on fixed and moveable climbing structures and the 'steps' mentioned are sometimes functional (e.g. toddler room is on first floor, so need to walk downstairs to get outside).

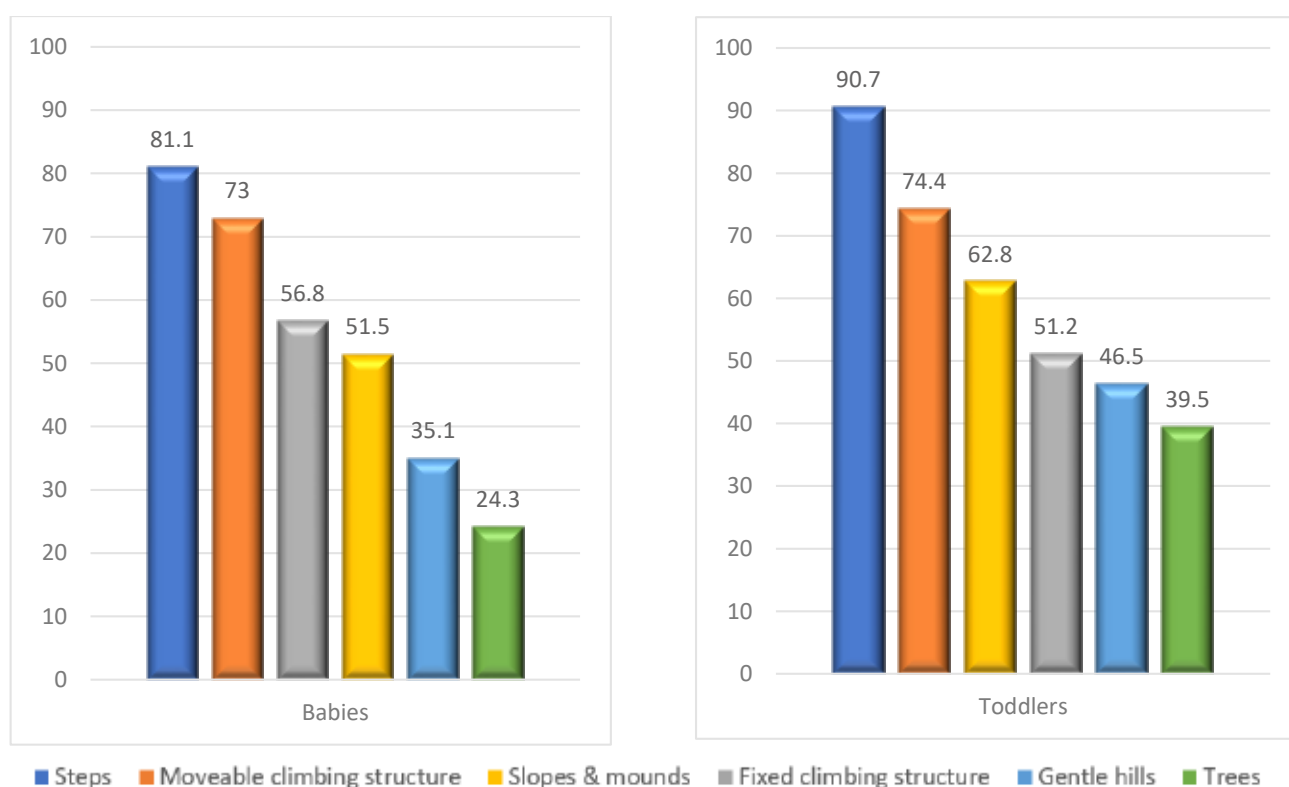


Fig. 7: Percentage of centres who have each resource to engage babies & toddlers in outdoor climbing activities

Provision to support walking and running is made for all toddlers but a minority of settings indicated it was not offered for babies (these are likely to be the settings with separate smaller spaces for babies).

Artificial grass is a popular choice of surface to support physical activity such as walking and running for this age group as is safety surfacing.

This also applies to crawling. Other types of physical activity supported include balancing, swinging and sliding (slides are provided at most settings).

At most settings, fine motor development is supported by digging and construction areas including sandpits, mud kitchens, and gardens/growing areas:

*Youngest children like to freely dig with hands or tools and copy older peers by watering, using small watering cans. (26U10)*

Loose parts are also commonly provided (78% for babies; 87% for toddlers):

*We have a 'no toy' approach at our setting so many of our resources are developed from loose parts. These can be made by the children or alongside the children to develop their key skills. (1R4)*

### 2.3.2 Encouraging sensory engagement

Respondents are aware that just being outside can be beneficial for babies and toddlers in diverse ways:

*The natural environment provides the exact stimulus that babies need without being too overpowering. Outdoor environments provide opportunities for babies to use all their senses to explore them. (5R8)*

*I would like to see outdoor provision for our littlest little people taken more seriously. It is not just a pitstop to run outside and come back in, it is a time to just be - we do not need an agenda! (1R4)*

A small number of settings emphasised the natural characteristics of the setting environment or indicated they were in the process of developing this.

**Most settings provide places for babies and toddlers to sit with some highlighting 'quiet areas' and the different types of resources they provide to support sensory engagement.** Other resources provided include outdoor beanbags, low level garden edging to sit on, blocks to sit on, mats, tyres, stepping stones and hard standing.

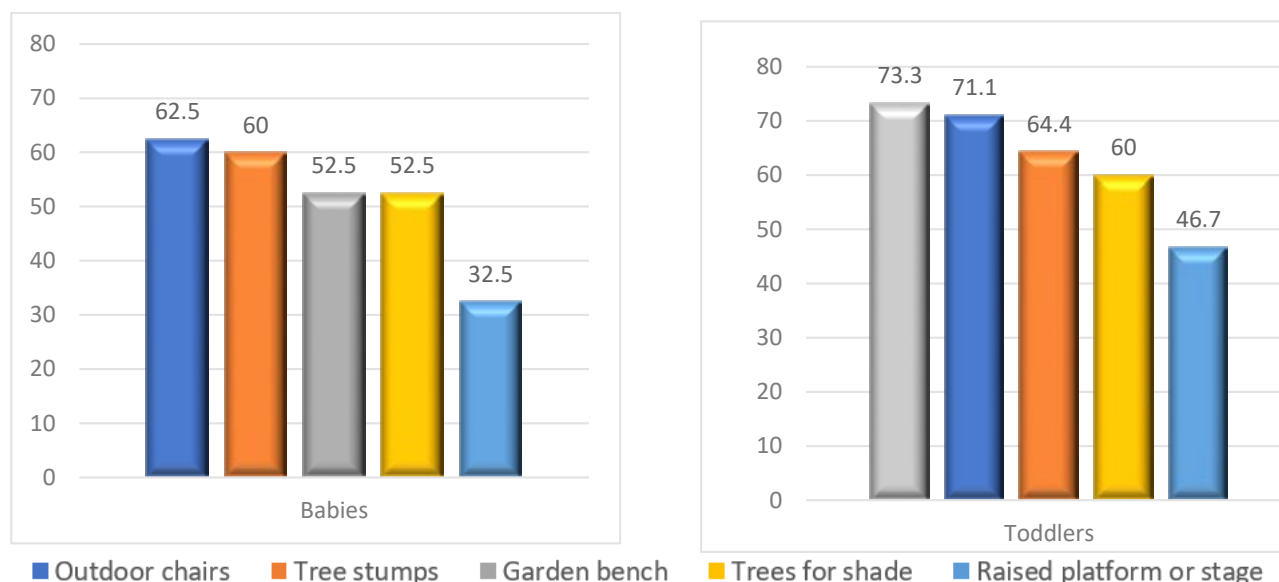


Fig. 8: Resources provided for babies & toddlers to sit on outdoors

Settings report they provide a rich sensory environment including herbs and flowers for smelling – edible plants were the least often reported feature.

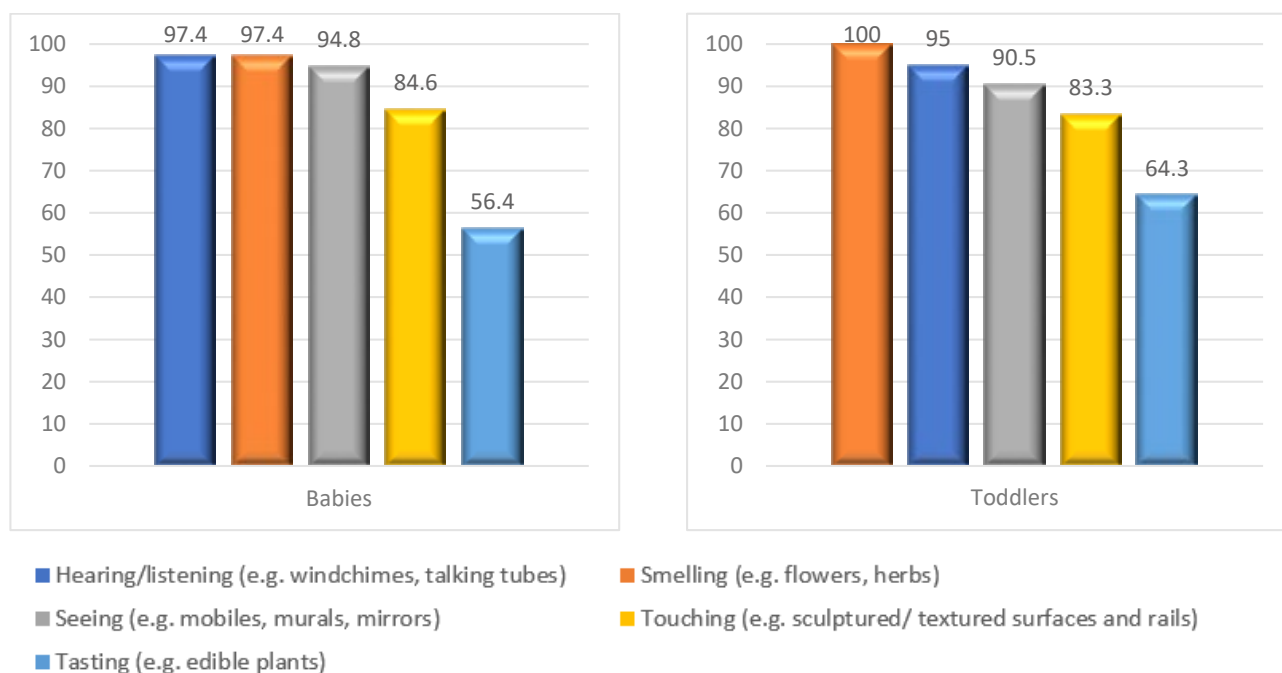


Fig. 9: Types of sensory engagement supported by the setting

Most settings provide facilities for babies and toddlers to dig and learn about growing plants such as planters, raised beds and tools. However, some reported a lack of success and confidence in growing plants.

Some settings include animal care as part of their provision. This was not something we specifically asked about, but feedback showed that this may include chickens, guinea pig, snails, fish and stick insects.

### 2.3.3 Sleeping outdoors

Just under half of respondents (49%) said that babies slept outside at their setting. The figure was marginally lower for toddlers (43%) presumably because some toddlers no longer sleep whilst attending the setting.

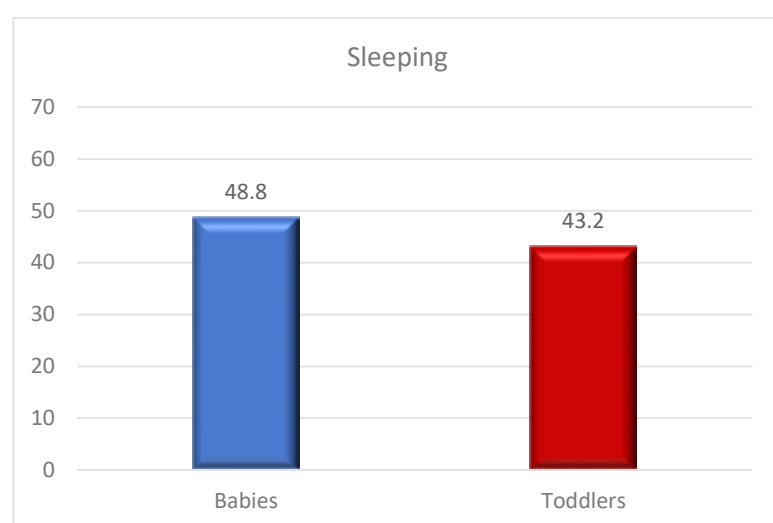


Fig.10: Percentage of settings reporting that babies and or toddlers sleep outside

The additional comments made by respondents offer further detail about what sleeping outside can mean in practice.

At most settings, babies and toddlers do not routinely sleep outside but they may be left outside if they have fallen asleep in a pushchair or pram whilst on a walk:

*Only if children have fallen asleep in pushchair when outside walking/ operating school runs, for example. (25U4)*

However, at some settings outdoor sleeping is actively encouraged by providing mats, blankets, cots or blankets:



*We have sleep pods outside; our children can crawl in and curl up when they need to or they can be encouraged to rest by their keypersons who recognize the signs of the need to rest in their individual children. We do not put our children to bed by the clock but by their needs. They may also go to sleep indoors. (1R4)*

*Sometimes the children sleep in the yurts, in tents, in the fields. If off-site, they may sleep in prams or take blankets. (10R7)*

Interestingly, even where there is provision for outdoor sleeping, this is not always used:

*Do have the facilities but they don't. (30U4)*

*Could if they wanted to. (26U10)*

Additionally, some concerns were raised about the safety of sleeping outside:

*We had babies sleeping outside in cots at one point but a baby got bitten/stung and the parent was not happy. We also found some babies struggled to sleep there as it didn't reflect their routine at home. We now have air con in the sleep room to keep the temperature suitable in there instead. (7U5)*

### 2.3.4 Eating outdoors

The outdoor environment is used as a place to eat and having a picnic or snack outside is a commonly reported activity. Over 90% of respondents said the children eat outside, although this is mostly in the summertime. Food tends to be brought from inside and tables, chairs and picnic blankets are provided to support the activity:

*have lunch outside in summer (30U4)*

*snacks outside in summer (37U8)*

*Snacks often taken outside by practitioners to share with their key-groups. (25U4)*

*We provide three meals per day here and grow vegetables and fruit with our children in our outdoor gardens. (1R4)*

## 2.4 FACTORS INFLUENCING TIME SPENT OUTDOORS

The most commonly reported influencing factor was weather. Out of the 30 qualitative comments made by respondents, the weather was referred to 14 times:

*if it's too hot we are limited to the times we can go and stay out and winter months due to coldness (11U10)*

However, other settings discussed how they overcame the limitations of weather through providing children with appropriate (and spare) clothing, creating areas of shade and cover from the rain. Another important factor was the **children's preference** with seven comments relating to children deciding or indicating where they wished to be:

*the indicators from the children themselves (19U5)*

The **daily routines** of sleeping, eating and nappy changing were felt to impact on time spent outdoors. At some settings these tasks are associated with being indoors and limit the opportunities to spend time outdoors.

**Staffing and ratios** were reported to be an influential factor and there are particular health and safety concerns about supervising children outside:

*Close supervision of our youngest children by their keyperson is usual practice, especially to limit ingestion of unwanted items. (25U4)*

**Parental support** is important and some settings report that parents do not value being outside and may be overprotective of their child.

*Parents do not feel that being outside is important. (19U5)*

*Parents can not want the children to go outside in colder weathers. (29U7)*

There is also concern about managing parental expectations in relation to being outside and risk:

*concern due to litigation from parents should there be an accident about taking the children outside and off site (10R7)*

**The nature and extent of outdoor area** available is also reported as influencing the frequency and type of access babies and toddlers have:

*the babies have free flow access to a decked area but the toddlers do not so it can be more difficult to get outside access more frequently (6U5)*

## 2.5 IMPORTANCE OF SPENDING TIME OUTSIDE

Almost all respondents agree that spending time outside was very important for both babies and toddlers.

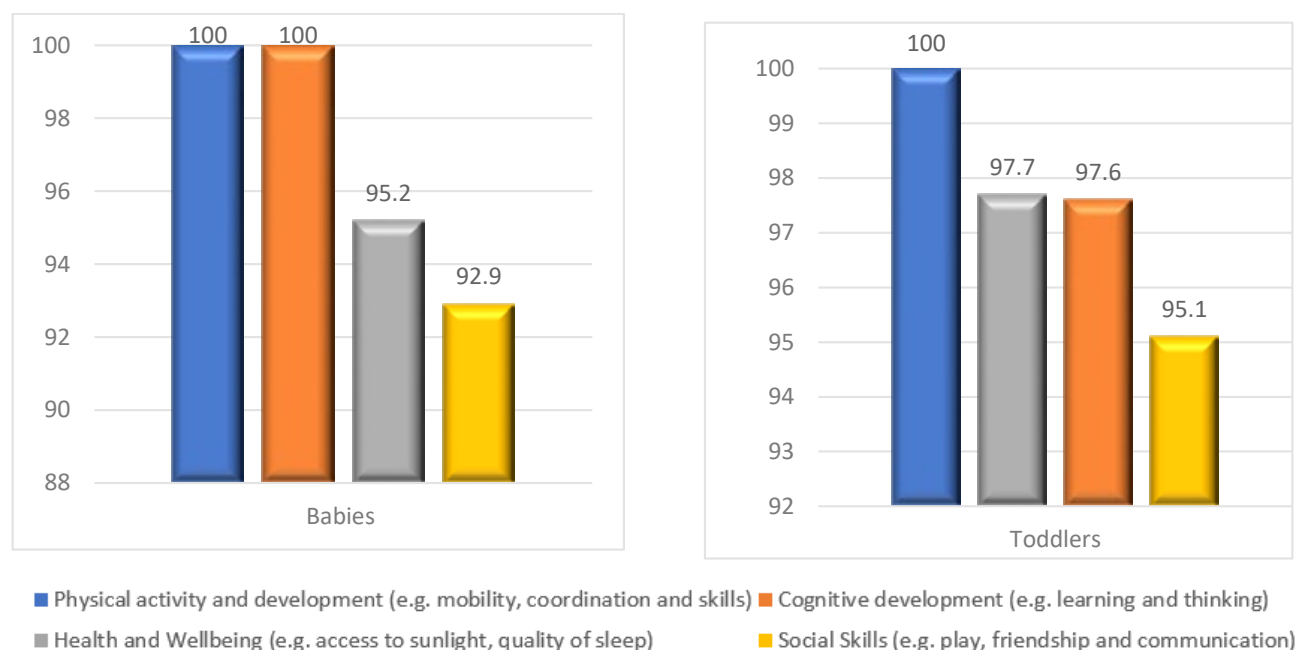


Fig. 11: The benefits of being outside for babies and toddlers

In relation to babies, all respondents emphasise the importance of the outdoors for physical and cognitive development. For toddlers, physical development and activity is particularly emphasised although the multiple benefits of time spent outdoors are reflected in the responses in Figure 11:

*Natural light is important to development of eyesight. Vitamin D through sunlight is important to growing bones. Physical play is important to development of fine and gross motor skills. Being outside encourages understanding of different skills and risks. The development of knowledge about the world around us and the stimulation of sounds and natural presences around us. (19U5)*

*Physical play is one of the prime areas of development. The outside space is the perfect opportunity for children to develop in all of the prime areas and to start to introduce the other areas of development such as maths/ exploring the world/ media and materials etc. The outside space excites the children, it allows the children to use their energy, to explore with all of their senses, they learn to risk take, trial and error, build relationships, etc. Playing and digging in the mud introduces them to germs/ bacteria and builds resilience. The opportunities are endless. (10R7)*

*Children can develop holistically from being in the outdoor environment. (12U5)*

The years between birth and two are understood as a particularly important time to lay sound foundations for future learning and development:

*If we know the early years are the most important time frame in which children are making connections with their world, especially up to age 2, then it seems even more that our very youngest children need to be given the opportunities to be outside along with their older peers. (25U4)*

The role of the setting in providing access to the outdoors is reported as particularly important for children who have little access in their home environment:

*Some children do not get to access the outdoor area at home, especially during the week if in nursery all day. (35U6)*

*It is important for them to experience outside, many of our children's outside experience is limited due to living in a flat. (12U5)*

*We live in a mixed area where some children could be classed as deprived, they live in flats with no garden or no access to outside play due to safety issues, fresh air is good for you, children can and do investigate their environment, by playing in the mud they also build up their immune system making them stronger health wise, physical activity also promotes stronger bones and healthy hearts, reduces the chances of being overweight and generally makes you feel healthy. (16U7)*



## 3. CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Our first report, based on a systematic review of the international research evidence, was framed around the provocative question ‘where are the babies?’<sup>7</sup>. We concluded that the youngest children are often excluded from outdoor environments and we were interested to understand whether this is the case in practice in England. The settings who responded to this audit represent a cross-section of settings with provision for under twos in Kent. Whilst there is consensus that spending time outdoors is important for both babies and toddlers, there is considerable variation in the level of resources they use to facilitate this and the priority it is given in practice. Some settings have very little space and few resources whilst others offer access to extensive and varied outdoor environments either directly linked to their sites or within their local community. Other factors such as the support of staff and parents also influence practice.

These findings suggest a more positive picture than expected. Babies and toddlers are being given opportunities to ‘make connections with their world’ (25U4) through accessing outdoor environments whilst in formal day care. However, from a Froebelian perspective, the lack of appreciation of the importance of ‘being in and with nature’ is a concern. Although daily access to the outdoors is typically provided all year round, the weather is clearly an important influencing factor. Even for the youngest children, the outdoors is understood as an environment which is important in supporting their physical development and activity. Settings also report they provide a rich and varied sensory environment outdoors to support cognitive development and health and well-being. However, the indications are that engagement with nature (e.g. trees, plants, animals) may be more limited. A surprisingly high number of settings reported that babies and toddlers sleep outside although closer analysis suggests that this may be irregular and unplanned rather than an integrated aspect of practice. The outdoors is understood as an appropriate environment to eat in, particularly during the summer months when snacks and meals may be enjoyed outside.

Although this audit is an important first step in understanding how settings provide for babies and toddlers outdoors, more information is needed. Further research is needed to understand the challenges and opportunities of providing high quality outdoor experiences for the youngest children in practice. This is the focus of the third stage of this research project which will involve developing case studies of practice from settings within diverse geographical and socio-economic contexts.

Dr Nicola Kemp  
Dr Ian Durrant  
Dr Jo Josephidou

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<sup>7</sup> Kemp, N. and Josephidou, J. (2020) *Where are the babies? Engaging under twos with the outdoors*. Available at: <https://www.froebel.org.uk/resources/froebel-trust-publications/>



# APPENDIX 1

## AUDIT OF OUTSIDE PROVISION

The survey is presented here in an abridged version for ease of reference.

### Babies and toddlers in the outdoor environment

Many thanks for participating in this survey about young children (0-2 years) and the outdoors. It is being conducted by Nicola Kemp and Jo Josephidou at Canterbury Christ Church University.

We would like to find out about provision and practice taking place for babies and toddlers in early years settings in Kent. No individual or setting will be identified in the research.

The survey should take no longer than 10 minutes to complete. If you are willing to take part in the survey can you please tick the box below.

When we have finished our research, we are hoping to produce some resources based on effective practice which we would be happy to share with you as a thank you for taking part.

*Nicola & Jo*

If you have any queries please email  
nicola.kemp@canterbury.ac.uk

jo.josephidou@canterbury.ac.uk

*Thank you for your time!*

### Consent to continue

☐ I understand the aim of this research and am happy to take part.

## Section 1 – Setting details

The information in this section will enable us to know who has completed the questionnaire.

### 1. Managerial responsibility:

☐ I am the setting manager

☐ I am not the setting manager

Skip To: Q5 If 1. Managerial responsibility: = I am the setting manager

If you are not the setting manager, please state your role:

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2. In order to identify the area in which settings are located please supply the setting's postcode. (Please note if you wish to withdraw from this research at any time you may do so, please contact us and cite your postcode so that your data can be deleted).

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## Section 2 -Your provision

For the purposes of the survey, babies are classified as between the ages of 0-12 months and toddlers are 13 -24 months.

### 3. Approximately how many children aged between 0-2yrs old are currently registered in your setting?

Babies \_\_\_\_\_

Toddlers \_\_\_\_\_

### 4. Approximately how many children aged between 0-2yrs old attend each day?

Babies \_\_\_\_\_

Toddlers \_\_\_\_\_

5. How is the accommodation in your setting organised, i.e. are babies and toddlers separated or do they share the same space?

	Inside	Outside
Separated		
Share space		

Other (please state)

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6. Approximately how big is the outdoor area you use for babies/toddlers? (please give in square meters if known)

	Indoor - square meters	Outdoor - square meters
Babies		
Toddlers		
Babies & Toddlers use the same area		

7. What types of surface does the outside your setting consist of?

☐ Artificial grass

☐ Bark

☐ Grass

☐ Hard surface (tarmac or paving stones)

☐ Soft surface

☐ Other (please state) \_\_\_\_\_

### Section 3 – Time spent outdoors

8a. On average, approximately how frequently are babies taken outdoors each day?

(questions repeated for toddlers)

	Not at all	Once a day	Twice a day	More than twice a day	Outdoor all day	Free flow
Spring (March-May)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Summer (June – Aug)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Autumn (Sept – Oct)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Winter (Nov- Feb)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

9. On average, how long do babies spend outside each day?

(questions repeated for toddlers)

	No time outside	Up to 30 minutes	Up to an hour	More than an hour
Spring (March-May)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Summer (June – Aug)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Autumn (Sept – Oct)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Winter (Nov- Feb)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

10. What are the most important factors which influence the duration and frequency of access to the outdoors at your setting?

---

11. What activities do children engage in outside and what resources are provided?

(please tick all which apply and add any additional comments you wish)

a) Sleeping

	Yes	No
Babies		
Toddlers		

Sleeping resources

	Mats	Cots	Prams	Blankets
Babies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Toddlers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Comments

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This format of question was repeated for the following activities:

	Activities	Resources					
b)	<i>Climbing</i>	Fixed climbing structure	Steps	Gentle hills	Slopes & mounds	Trees	Moveable climbing structure
c)	<i>Balancing</i>	Balance beam	Stepping-stone path	Pull-up bar			
d)	<i>Walking/running</i>	Open grassy area	Safety surface	Walking/pushing toys			
e)	<i>Swinging/sliding</i>	Swing	See-saw	Slide			
f)	<i>Sitting</i>	Garden bench	Outdoor chairs	Tree stumps	Trees for shade	Raised platform or stage	
g)	<i>Crawling</i>	Long grass	Short grass	Tarmac (hard)	Soft surface	Trees for shade	Walking/crawling path
h)	<i>Riding</i>	Ride-on toys	Trikes	Scooters	Push chairs & prams		
i)	<i>Eating</i>	Edible fruits	Vegetables	Tables & chairs	Picnic blankets		
j)	<i>Growing plants</i>	Garden	Planters	Garden tools			
k)	<i>Digging</i>	Sandpit	Garden beds				
l)	<i>Hiding</i>	Tents	Dens	Playhouse			
m)	<i>Creating &amp; Constructing</i>	Loose parts	Blocks	Mark making	Craft		
n)	<i>Creating &amp; Constructing resources</i>	Loose parts	Blocks	Mark making	Craft		
o)	<i>Exploratory play</i>	Mud/Soil	Sand	Water	Bubbles	Minibeasts equipment	
p)	<i>Using senses</i>	Hearing/listening (e.g. windchimes, talking tubes)	Seeing (e.g. mobiles, murals, mirrors)	Smelling (e.g. flowers, herbs)	Tasting (e.g. edible plants)	Touching (e.g. sculptured/textured surfaces and rails)	
q)	<i>Using language</i>	Books	Musical instruments	Story props	Role Play		

Other: Please add any other elements in your provision. (If any activities are specifically aimed at babies or toddlers please make that clear).

## Section 4 - Your views

12. How important do you think it is for babies and toddlers to spend time outside?

	Very important	Quite important	Neither important nor unimportant	Quite unimportant	Very unimportant
Babies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Toddlers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please explain your answer

---

13. What do you think are the benefits, if any, for babies of being outside?

	Very important	Quite important	Neither important nor unimportant	Quite unimportant	Very unimportant	Don't know
<b>Health and Wellbeing</b> e.g. access to sunlight, quality of sleep)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Physical activity and development</b> (e.g. mobility, coordination and skills)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Social Skills</b> (e.g. play, friendship and communication)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Cognitive development</b> (e.g. learning and thinking)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Other (please state)

---

14. What do you think are the benefits, if any, for toddlers of being outside?

	Very important	Quite important	Neither important nor unimportant	Quite unimportant	Very unimportant	Don't know
<b>Health and Wellbeing</b> (e.g. access to sunlight, quality of sleep)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Physical activity and development</b> (e.g. mobility, coordination and skills)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Social Skills</b> (e.g. play, friendship and communication)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Cognitive development</b> (e.g. learning and thinking)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Other (please state)

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15. What are the challenges to being outside with babies and toddlers in your setting?

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## Section 5 – Final comments and further research

16. Given that the aim of this research is to audit outdoor provision for babies and toddlers (0-2yr olds) in Kent, is there anything you would like to add or believe would be useful for us to know?

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17. Further research Following this first phase of the research we would like to visit settings across the county and conduct case studies. These will involve interviewing staff as well as learning more about the activities and facilities provided. If you would be willing to contribute to this or would like to learn more, please supply your contact details below.

Name

Email

Telephone number



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